Europe had few contacts with American intellectuals and knew little of American universities, science, literature, and art. Times have changed, but the old clichés remain. During our trip to Europe in 1950 we heard a lot of talk about American materialism, and more recently, touring India in 1955-56, we listened to Indian intellectuals who contrasted their spiritualistic approach to life with American materialism. We have also observed with amazement that many Americans felt themselves on thin ice in discussing the comparative ranking of spiritual and material values in Asia and America. But we believe that, whatever the definition of materialism, there is no evidence that modern America is more materialistic than Europe or Asia.

Good food and wine constitute an essential part of the French concept of the aesthetics of life. American gastronomy does not satisfy the palate of French connoisseurs. To some of them, the quick lunch in a cafeteria or at a drugstore counter is evidence of a lack of civilization in the United States. We were treated to a fine dinner in Paris. My neighbor at table, a young professor of history, remarked with a polite smile, "Don't you agree that a nation is not civilized unless it has learned to appreciate fine food?"

"Your yardstick of civilization is new to me," I replied. "The ancient Greeks despised the barbarians for their elaborate meals and preferred their own simple fare."

I have heard German philistines discuss "American civilization." From the height of their own achievement—of course not during World War II—they looked down on materialistic America: insufficient understanding of serious music, little interest in philosophy, lack of higher spiritual values. But was it not superlatively civilized Germany that aligned itself behind a half-illiterate thug with the moral instincts of a gorilla? Perhaps materialism is characteristic of all modern civilization. Except for totalitarian countries where human behavior is governed by fear, and areas where only a primitive subsistence economy exists, money is the mainspring of human economic activity in all modern societies. The United States is no exception to this rule. Its businessmen are in business not for the fun of it but for profit, and are accustomed to measure success and failure in terms of money. But money does not mean more in the United States than in the older countries. Here, as there, some people kill themselves in an effort to build up bank accounts, while others take life easy. It is characteristic of this country, however, that brains and skill often yield more income than does hereditary wealth. It is also fairly certain that the creative element in the operation of big business and the spirit of competition are more important for the big captains of industry in America than in the old countries.

During our European trip, we met a man who had spent the war

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